

A Man Who Had No Eyes

by MacKinlay Kantor

Notes

A beggar was coming down the avenue just as Mr. Parsons emerged from his hotel.

He was a blind beggar, carrying the traditional battered cane and thumping his way before him with the cautious, half-furtive effort of the sightless. He was a shaggy, thick-necked fellow; his coat was greasy about the lapels and pockets, and his hand splayed over the cane's crook with a futile sort of clinging. He wore a black pouch slung over his shoulder. Apparently he had something to sell.

The air was rich with spring, sun was warm and yellowed on the asphalt. Mr. Parsons, standing there in front of his hotel and noting the clack-clack approach of the sightless man, felt a sudden and foolish sort of pity for all blind creatures.

And, thought Mr. Parsons, he was very glad to be alive. A few years ago he had been a little more than a skilled laborer; now he was successful, respected, admired... Insurance... And he had done it alone, unaided struggling beneath handicaps... and he was still young. The blue air of spring, fresh from its memories of windy pools and lush shrubbery, could thrill him with eagerness.



Cigarette Lighters for Sale

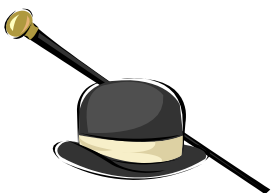
Mr. Parsons took a step forward just as the tap-tap-tapping blind man passed him by. Quickly the shabby fellow turned.

“Listen, guv’nor. Just a minute of your time.”

Mr. Parson said, “It’s late. I have an appointment. Do you want me to give you something?”

“I ain’t no beggar, guv’nor. You bet I ain’t I got a handy little article here”—he fumbled until he could press a small object into Mr. Parson’s hand—“that I sell. One buck. Best cigarette lighter made.”

Mr. Parsons stood there, somewhat annoyed and embarrassed. He was a handsome figure with his immaculate gray suit and gray hat and Malacca stick. Of course the man with the cigarette lighters could not see him... “But I don’t smoke,” he said.



“Listen, I bet you know plenty people who smoke. Nice little present,” *wheedled* the man. “And mister, you wouldn’t mind helping a poor guy out?” He clung to Mr. Parson’s sleeve.

Mr. Parsons sighed and felt in his vest pocket. He brought out two half dollars and pressed them into the man’s hand. “Certainly. I’ll help you out. As you say, I can give it to someone. Maybe the elevator boy would—“ He hesitated, not wishing to be boorish and inquisitive, even with a blind peddler. “Have you lost your sight entirely?”

A Chemical Explosion Disaster

The shabby man pocketed the two half dollars. “Fourteen years, guv’nor.” Then he added, with an insane sort of pride, “Westbury, sir. I was one of ‘em.”

“Westbury,” repeated Mr. Parsons. “Ah, yes, the chemical explosion... The papers haven’t mentioned it for years. But at the time it was supposed to be one of the greatest disasters in—“



“They’ve all forgot about it.” The fellow shifted his feet wearily. “I tell you, guv’nor, a man who was in it don’t forget about it. Last thing I ever saw was C shop going up in one grand smudge and gas pouring in at all the busted windows.”

Mr. Parsons coughed, but the blind peddler was caught up with the train of his one dramatic reminiscence. And also, he was thinking that there might be more half dollars in Mr. Parson’s pocket.

“Just think about it, guv’nor. There was a hundred and eight people killed, about two hundred injured, and over fifty of them lost their eyes. Blind as bats—“ He groped forward until his dirty hand rested against Mr. Parson’s coat. “I tell you sir, there wasn’t nothing worse than that in the war, OK. I would have been well took care of. But I was just a workman, working for what was in it. And I got it. You’re so right I got it, while the capitalists were making their dough! They was insured, don’t worry about that. They—“



“Insured,” repeated his listener. “Yes. That’s what I sell—“

Blinded by the Accident

“You want to know how I lost my eyes?” cried the man. “Well, here it is!” His words fell with the bitter and studied drama of a story often told, and told for money. “I was there in C shop, last of all the folks rushing out. Out in the air there was a chance, even with building exploding right and left. A lot of guys made it

safe out the door and got away. And just when I was about there, crawling along between those big vats, a guy behind me grabs my leg. He says, ‘Let me past, you--!; Maybe he was nuts, I dunno. I try to forgive him in my heart, guv’nor. But he was bigger than me. He hauls me back and climbs right over me! Tramples me into the dirt. And he gets out, and I lie there with all that poison gas pouring down on all sides of me, and flame and stuff...’ He swallowed—a studied sob—and stood dumbly expectant. He could image the next words: Tough luck, my man, Awfully tough. Now I want to—

“That’s the story, guv’nor.”

The spring wind shrilled past them, damp and quivering.

An Unexpected Twist

“Not quite,” said Mr. Parsons.

The blind peddler shivered crazily. “Not quite? What do you mean?”

“The story is true,” Mr. Parsons said, “except that it was the other way round.”

“Other way around?” He croaked unamiably. “Say, guv’nor—“

“I was in C shop,” said Mr. Parsons. “It was the other way around. You were the fellow who hauled back on me and climbed over me. You were bigger than I was, Markwardt.”

The blind man stood for a long time, swallowing hoarsely. He gulped: “Parsons, I thought you—“ And then he screamed fiendishly: “Yes. Maybe so. Maybe so. But I’m blind I’m blind, and you’ve been standing here letting me spout to you, and laughing at me every minute! I’m blind!”

People in the street turned to stare at him.

“You got away, but I’m blind! Do you hear! I’m—“

“Well,” said Mr. Parsons, “don’t make such a row about it Markwardt. So am I.”



1) Read this phrase from paragraph 2.

he was a shaggy, thick-necked fellow

What is the connotation of *shaggy*?

- A) hunched over
- B) sloppy
- C) poor
- D) blind

2) Read these sentences from paragraph 4.

A few years ago he had been little more than a skilled laborer; now he was successful, respected, admired...Insurance...And he had done it alone, unaided, struggling beneath handicaps...

These sentences are an example of--

- A) foreshadowing
- B) symbolism
- C) dialogue
- D) flashback

3) How have Mr. Parsons' experiences affected the way he looks at beggars?

- A) He looks down on them
- B) He is skeptical of the stories they tell.
- C) He is afraid of becoming like them.
- D) He can relate to their suffering, so he does not want to insult them.

4) After the explosion, Mr. Parsons—

- A) worked hard and became a successful insurance salesman
- B) used a large insurance settlement to buy a hotel
- C) changed his name so no one would know what he had done

D) worked his way up at a hotel until he became the owner

5) The beggar tells people this version of the story because he thinks that people—

- A) will give him money if they feel sorry for him
- B) want to hear a sad story
- C) should know the truth
- D) should be reminded of the explosion

6) In paragraph 26, the beggar learns that he is talking to the man that he climbed over. How does the beggar respond to this?

- A) He apologizes to Mr. Parsons
- B) He gets angry and accuses Mr. Parsons of laughing at him.
- C) He turns and walks away embarrassed.
- D) He yells loudly because he fears Mr. Parsons will attack him in the street.

7) Read the last two sentences of the story.

"Well," said Mr. Parsons, "don't make such a row about it, Markwardt. So am I."

What does Mr. Parsons mean by *make such a row about it*?

- A) to be really loud or noisy
- B) to focus all of one's energy on something
- C) to call attention to something as if it is really important
- D) to create something new

8) From what point of view is this story written?

- A) First person
- B) Second person
- C) Third person
- D) the beggar's point of view

9) This story could best be used to support which of these ideas?

- A) Life is not as bad as it seems
- B) Sooner or later we have to pay for the things we do.
- C) An event is only tragic if we allow it to ruin us.
- D) There are worse things than being poor.

10) Which of these events happen first in Mr. Parson's life?

- A) He buys a hotel.
- B) He buys a lighter from a beggar.
- C) He tries to get out of a building after an explosion.
- D) He goes blind.

11) What is the main difference between Mr. Parsons and the beggar?

- A) The beggar is blind.
- B) Mr. Parsons does not feel sorry for himself.
- C) Mr. Parsons makes his money stealing from others.
- D) The beggar suffered a great tragedy.

12) What is the main problem Mr. Parsons faces in this story?

- A) He is blind.
- B) He is poor.
- C) A beggar wants to get money from him.
- D) He is forced to remember a terrible tragedy from his past.

13) How does the mood of the story change?

- A) from cheerful to gloomy to unsure or awkward
- B) from serious to lighthearted to sorrowful
- C) from lonely to sentimental to mournful
- D) from regretful to proud to shameful

14) Why doesn't the author tell the story from the time the men first met until now?

- A) to create a surprise ending
- B) to show that the past is not important
- C) to show that we should be careful about telling lies
- D) to create suspense